

SESSION 11

Covenant Relationship

DEUTERONOMY 28:1-6,15-19

BELIEVERS FIND GOD'S BLESSINGS THROUGH OBEDIENCE.



We've all seen it. The parent is down on one knee, talking to her child on the first day of a new school year. "Now, you have your backpack? Good. Remember to do what the teacher tells you. No acting up. Don't forget to bring home any papers I need to sign. Don't lose your lunch money. And have fun!" At this point, the parent isn't telling the child anything new. He or she is reinforcing and putting a new emphasis on what the child has heard countless times.

WHAT WISE "MESSAGES" DID YOUR PARENTS REPEAT TO YOU OVER AND OVER AGAIN?
WHAT IMPACT DID HEARING THOSE WORDS HAVE ON YOU?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

Deuteronomy contains Moses's messages to the Israelites before they entered the promised land. The first (1:1-4:49) recalled their history as they traveled from Mount Sinai to their then-current location on the Plains of Moab, east of the Jordan River and across from Jericho. His second message (5:1-26:19) reviewed the Ten Commandments and how to apply them in the promised land.

The final verses of Moses's second message (26:16-19) serve as a summary of chapters 12-26. They remind God's people to obey God's commands. Doing so affirmed that the Lord was their God. Additionally, God promised to elevate His people above all other peoples. These four verses firmly connect what came before (chaps. 1-26) with what came afterward (chaps. 27-28).

Twice, verses 16-19 use the word "today," undergirding the commitment God has for His people and His people have for Him. Ancient Near Eastern covenants and/or treaties included statements of mutual commitment. These covenants and treaties also

included promised rewards for honoring the agreement and, in contrast, consequences of disobeying it. This is the emphasis of today's text, Deuteronomy 27-28.

God instructed His people to have a ceremony once they entered Canaan. They were to celebrate their entrance into the land and seal the terms of the covenantal agreement. This ceremony was to take place on two mountains in Samaria. Mount Ebal, the northern of the two, rises to about 1,400 feet; Mount Gerizim rises to 2,850 feet. Half the tribes would gather on Mount Ebal and the others on Mount Gerizim. The people were to set up an altar on Mount Ebal and offer sacrifices to God there.

In the saddle between the two mountains is Shechem. This was the site of Jacob's well, where, centuries later, Jesus met a Samaritan woman. Her forefathers had worshiped on "this mountain," meaning Mount Gerizim (John 4:20).



1 “Now **A** if you faithfully obey **B** the LORD your God and are careful to follow all his commands I am giving you today, the LORD your God will put you **far above** **C** all the nations of the earth. **2** All these blessings will come and **overtake** **D** you, because you obey the LORD your God: **3** You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country. **4** Your offspring will be blessed, and your land’s produce, and the offspring of your livestock, including the young of your herds and the newborn of your flocks. **5** Your basket and kneading bowl will be blessed. **6** You will be blessed when you **come in** **E** and blessed when you go out. (. . .) **15** But if you do not obey **F** the LORD your God by carefully following all his commands and statutes I am giving you today, all these **curses** **G** will come and overtake you: **16** You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country. **17** Your basket and kneading bowl will be cursed. **18** Your offspring will be cursed, and your land’s produce, the young of your herds, and the newborn of your flocks. **19** You will be cursed when you come in and cursed when you go out.”

A. Moses had talked about God’s expectations for “this day” or “today” (Deut. 26:16-19) before shifting to life in Canaan (27:2). Chapter 28 returns his attention to “now” and “today.”

B. “If” highlights that God’s blessings were not automatic. They were based on Israel’s obedience to His commands.

C. Moses had said that God would exalt Israel (26:19), but this verse again highlights obedience. He did not elevate the Israelites for their own sake, but for His glory. He would be honored when His people lived in holiness.

D. “Accompany” (NIV). The Hebrew suggests a pursuit or chase. It also could relate to reaching a goal. God’s blessings always find God’s people when they remain faithful to Him.

E. The Hebrew word relates to a trip or journey. For four decades, Israel’s travels had been part of God’s judgment. Through obedience, their travels in Canaan would yield prosperity.

F. The curses are not inevitable. Like the blessings, they were conditional. But if the people chose to disobey, they would face the consequences.

G. An expression of ill will, often taking the form of God’s wrath. Here, the curses for disobedience parallel the blessings for obedience.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

1. Faithfulness

(Deut. 28:1-6)

Believers should enjoy the blessing that comes from following God's commands.

- **What do these verses say about the faithfulness of God toward His people? How would these promises encourage God's people to remain faithful to Him?**
- **How do these promised blessings differ from the prosperity theology that is commonly taught and preached today?**

2. Disobedience

(Deut. 28:15-19)

Choosing to disregard God's commands leads to humiliation.

- **What do these curses say about God's nature and character?**

Apply the Text

- **God blesses us so that we can be a conduit of His blessings to others. In what way do you share His blessings?**
- **Be ready to discuss with your group specific ideas about sharing those blessings with someone. What action plan can you make to be a blessing to a certain individual?**

KEY DOCTRINE:

Man

Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God. (See John 1:16-17; Romans 5:20-21.)

BIBLE SKILL:

Read and reflect on a Bible passage.

Read Deuteronomy 28:1-6. Try to imagine a life where every aspect of it experienced God's blessing. What would that look like in your life? How and where would God's blessing manifest itself? Now read verses 15-19 and try to imagine life totally apart from God's blessing. How might the thought of such an awful alternative motivate people to live faithfully by God's commands? God wanted to see His people demonstrate their faith in Him through obedience to His commands. How does James describe that concept (Jas. 2:18)?

TALK IT OUT

Focus on Deuteronomy 28:9. What is the promise in this verse?

The relationship between God and Israel was a covenant relationship. Faithfulness to God's commands would be rewarded. God would exalt the Israelites above all other nations. They and their children would be blessed, and their land and crops would be prosperous.

What blessings can we expect to experience if we obey God and walk in His ways?

Moses put before Israel two options. As a people, they would have to decide which they would choose: obedience that would lead to life, or disobedience that would lead to destruction. We face the same choice today. When we choose to walk in God's ways, we experience the blessings that come with obedience. But if we choose to disregard His Word and His way, we will experience the consequences of our disobedience. God's desire is to bless His people.

How can we encourage one another to walk in God's ways?

Use a Sharpie to write “walk in His ways” on the bottom of your shoe. Each time you put on or take off your shoes, reflect on what it means to walk in the ways of the Lord.

Prayer Requests / Notes

DAILY EXPLORATION



Day 1: Deuteronomy 28:1-2

Highlight the word “overtake.”

The word *bless* occurs seven times in verses 2-6. It appears in verse 2 in noun form as “blessings”; the remaining six are verbs. The emphasis of these verses is on God blessing His people.

The root behind the Hebrew verb translated “overtake” means to reach or take hold of something or someone. It was used in the story of the Egyptian army pursuing Moses and his people as they neared the Red Sea. Scripture says, “The Egyptians—all Pharaoh’s horses and chariots, his horsemen, and his army—chased after them and *caught up with* them as they camped by the sea” (Ex. 14:9, emphasis added).

One does not passively overtake something or someone. Determination and effort are involved. The promise was that God’s blessings would actively pursue His people. With the promise, though, came a contingency. God’s blessings would pursue and take hold of His people because they made it their practice to “obey the LORD.”

The Lord stated one of His blessings in verse 1. God promised to place His people “far above all the nations of the earth.” Again, this was not something the people could achieve under their own power. They had neither the resources nor training to make such an achievement. Only the power and presence of God could make that happen.

What is the connection between obedience and blessing?



Day 2: Deuteronomy 28:3

Read James 1:17 and identify the source of all blessings.

The term translated “blessed” carries the idea of being prosperous. In modern culture, we tend to think of prosperity in terms of financial resources. The Hebrew word did not have this limitation. To be blessed meant to have one’s life filled with benefits. God is the ultimate source of all blessings. Further, the Hebrews understood that God gave His blessing so the recipient might be a blessing. In other words, the original recipient was a conduit through which God’s blessings flowed to others. Being able to bless others was a sign of living a prosperous life.

This is a far cry from the false teaching about prosperity theology that many proclaim today. Many claim that God will give people material goods and riches if they will only—fill in the blank. What God was promising the Israelites was to honor those who honor Him with proper actions and motives. God will not be mocked and cannot be manipulated. He expects those who serve Him to do so out of love and gratitude, not out of selfish greed. What God desires is a broken spirit and a humble heart (Ps. 51:17).

How do these promised blessings differ from the prosperity theology that is commonly taught and preached today?



Day 3: Deuteronomy 28:4-6

Underline the repeated words in verses 4-6.

Fertility among flocks, fields, and families was the most important contributor to the long-term survival of a household, people, or nation. The text uses the same Hebrew word three times in this one verse to refer to fertility. The literal translation is “fruit” or “fruitfulness.” Thus, the verse declares, “Your fruit will be blessed, your land’s fruit, and the fruit of your livestock will be blessed.” The picture is of abundance.

Context affected how the Hebrews heard this message. The Israelites were going into the land of Canaan. Baal and Astarte, the primary deities of the Canaanites, were known as fertility gods. Pagans worshiped them, prayed to them, and gave them offerings, believing that these so-called gods could bring an abundance of children, harvest, and cattle. Worshipers of these deities often participated in sexual activities, believing their actions would motivate the gods to bless their harvests and homes. This lure was part of the reason God repeatedly told His people to destroy every vestige and site of Canaanite worship.

What an affirmation of the Lord, the God of the Hebrews. He alone was the One who could cause families, cattle, and harvests to be fruitful. For His people, God’s bounty and abundance were comprehensive. Every area of their lives would be blessed.

How do the promises in these verses encourage you to remain faithful to Him?



Day 4: Deuteronomy 28:15-16

Underline the repeated words in verses 15-16.

Just as faithfulness to God’s commands would lead to blessings, failure to follow God’s commands would lead to curses. The list of prescribed disasters and miseries (vv. 15-68) is longer than the list of blessings for obedience (vv. 1-14). This was common in ancient agreements. Evidently, negative reinforcement was more effective in eliciting compliance than promised future rewards.

To be cursed “in the city” and “the country” meant the person was cursed wherever he or she was. Being opposites, and yet used together, city and country meant everywhere. This grammatical device is similar to our saying that we’ve searched high and low for something. That means we’ve searched everywhere we can imagine. This thought of being cursed everywhere had to be horrifying. It meant that all of life’s activities were cursed. It was a life of hardship and humiliation, of difficulty and deprivation. These verses outline some of those challenges.

One thing that is clear throughout these verses is that the consequences for disobedience come from the hand of God. “The LORD will send against you curses, confusion, and rebuke in everything you do until you are destroyed and quickly perish, because of the wickedness of your actions in abandoning me” (v. 20).

What do you think a “cursed” life looks like today?



Day 5: Deuteronomy 28:17-19

Underline the repeated words in verses 17-19.

For one's "basket" and "kneading bowl" to be cursed meant that obtaining the most basic necessity of daily life was going to be a hardship. In other words, God's curses were going to hit people right where they lived.

The curses affecting the Israelites' offspring, produce, herds, and flocks would come as diseases and drought (Deut. 28:22-24, 60-61). Many would die. God said, "Though you were as numerous as the stars of the sky, you will be left with only a few people, because you did not obey the LORD your God. Just as the LORD was glad to cause you to prosper and to multiply you, so he will also be glad to cause you to perish and to destroy you" (vv. 62-63a).

The picture in the curses is of a life of misery. This, though, is not God's desire. The purpose of the curses was to draw God's people back to Himself. He is holy; it is His nature and His character. He calls His people to be holy and wholly devoted to Him (Lev. 20:26; Deut. 26:16; 1 Thess. 4:7; 1 Pet. 1:16). He is still calling His people to commit ourselves to Him today and all our "todays" going forward.

What do these curses say about God's nature and character? Praise Him for those things.

APPLY THE TEXT

This week, as you "do good deeds," ask yourself, "Why am I doing this—to bring glory to God or myself?" What actions can you take to make sure your works come from a pure heart?

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